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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3356
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0973
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000508

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SUBJECT: LEGAL NGO SUPPORTS CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES BY OFFERING
INCOME GENERATING SERVICES

REF: 08 ASHGABAT 1084

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but Unclassified. Not for Internet distribution

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Six months after reports of questionable business practices (reftel), Post checked in with local NGO "Bosfor" for an update on its activities. The NGO carries out youth outreach and provides legal services, including a legal library. It operates under the umbrella of Turkmenistan's Youth Union, but as a rare, independently registered NGO. The group uses fees collected by its business-related legal consultations to fund its other activities. Despite its affiliation with the Youth Union, the NGO faces ongoing red tape with licensing and registration requirements, which also resulted in the discontinuation of its public Internet center. While the international community has not re-engaged with Bosfor, it might have hit on a formula for a sustainable independent NGO with its business-oriented revenue stream. END SUMMARY.

YOUTH OUTREACH AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE

[1](#)3. (SBU) The Director General of "Bosfor", Zalina Rossoshanskaya, recently briefed Embassy Political Assistant about the organization's background and activities. Bosfor, founded in 1999 by Turkmenistan's Youth Union under the Law on State Youth Policy, conducts educational and awareness programs for young people. Bosfor also provides consultation services to the public, mostly youth, on legal, labor and business issues and runs a legal library. The organization consists of six staff members and works on a self-financed basis. All employees are lawyers by education each specializing in a specific area such as labor law, civil law, housing law, military service, and business consulting.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Bosfor's youth outreach programs include lectures to youth groups on subjects such as children's rights, universal human rights (at a local Russian school), and on compulsory military service (at the Military Enlistment Office of the Ministry of Defense). Its law library includes printed and electronic versions of national legislation in Turkmen and Russian languages received from unofficial sources in the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). The problem of compilation of Turkmen legislation, according to Rossoshanskaya, is that "not all legislation is being published, therefore, Bosfor

turns to its unofficial contacts in MOJ to obtain non-published pieces for its library." The UN, OSCE, and UK Embassy provide Bosfor with the texts of foreign legislation in English. Bosfor also has a computer room with 12 computers for visitors to use. Most visitors are young people, students who use the law library's services for preparing their school assignments.

FEES FOR BUSINESS LAW CONSULTATIONS PAY THE BILLS

15. (SBU) Bosfor provides legal consultations to the public, including disadvantaged groups such as religious minorities and refugees. At its law library, these groups and individuals find legislation that they cannot access elsewhere. According to Rossoshanskaya, "knowing that these groups have no other place to turn for legal assistance, we always welcome them at Bosfor." Bosfor also provides legal advice concerning business matters on a fee basis. This activity is its main revenue source to pay staff salaries, rent, and telephone and utility bills. With regard to international cooperation activity, earlier this year, Bosfor conducted a review of the situation of homosexuals in Turkmenistan for a Croatian organization.

PUBLIC ACCESS INTERNET CENTER SHUT DOWN

16. (SBU) From 2005 to 2006 Bosfor implemented a UK Embassy project that involved operating an Internet center in the NGO's premises. The UK Embassy provided equipment (eleven computers) for this purpose, and Bosfor charged fees for Internet use to make the venture self-supporting. Despite the fact that the Center was quite popular among visitors, in late 2007, the Ministry of Communications (MOC) closed the Center and fined Bosfor on the grounds that the NGO

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did not hold a license allowing it to provide Internet services.

KEEPING REGISTRATION CURRENT IS AN ONGOING CHALLENGE

17. (SBU) Although Bosfor was registered when established in 1999, it had to re-register in 2004 after the Law on Public Organizations was adopted. This law required re-registration of all public organizations (NGOs). In 2007, Bosfor had to register again for the purpose of specifying the kinds of educational activities that it carries out. In accordance with the January 2009 Presidential decree that re-denominated the national currency, all financial and economic entities, including those such as Bosfor, will have to re-register before the end of 2009. Currently, Bosfor is also in the process of obtaining a license for its educational activities from the Ministry of Education, which will issue it only with preliminary approval of the Supreme Council on Science and Technology. Bosfor's parent organization, the Youth Union, is assisting it in getting the license.

GOVERNMENT'S VIEW ON CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

18. (SBU) When asked which civil society activities the government would support, Rossoshanskaya first offered to name areas of activity that irritate the government. Those fields are mass media, religion, and monopoly law. With regard to religion, she said that in the past Bosfor initiated a roundtable for religious groups to bring them and authorities together to facilitate understanding among them. It also developed a proposal to raise youth awareness of various religious groups existing in the country. However, it was not allowed to hold such an event. Among areas that the government likes, Rossoshanskaya named tourism and small business development.

19. (SBU) Regarding areas in which civil society is needed the most, Rossoshanskaya mentioned prisons, detention centers, and tuberculosis centers. According to her, individuals released from prison have problems finding employment. Employers refuse employment as soon as they find out that they were imprisoned. These individuals often turn to Bosfor for legal assistance, however, "there is almost nothing we can do for them," said Rossoshanskaya.

110. (SBU) COMMENT: In a tough climate for NGOs, Bosfor persists,

despite the continuous challenge of coping with government bureaucracy and the drying up of funds from international organizations. There clearly is a need for the kinds of legal information and services that Bosfor provides, and it has taken advantage of this niche to generate revenues that support its nonprofit side. The nonprofit side also meets a need, as Post has received favorable testimonials from harassed religious groups who commented that, but for Bosfor, they would have nowhere to turn for legal advice. It is unfortunate that the group was not able to maintain sufficiently high ethical standards needed for it to continue enjoying the confidence and support of the international donor community. END COMMENT.

MILES